How To Control The Texas Harvester Ant

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The Texas harvester ant (red ant) is a very common pest in Texas and other southwestern states. This ant destroys many kinds of plants and collects and stores seeds of alfalfa, clovers, small grains, grasses and the sunflower.

DESCRIPTION, LIFE HISTORY AND HABITS

One of the first signs of these ants is a smooth, cleared circular area in lawns, fields of alfalfa or other crops. The ants clear all the vegetation from around the entrance to their underground nest. The size of the cleared area depends upon the size of the colony and the entrance to the nest is usually near the center of the cleared area. The entrance holes vary in size from one-fourth to one-half inch in diameter and some even larger. Large colonies may have more than one entrance hole. No pronounced mound is made around the entrance hole.

Inside the nest are several types of individuals called "castes." These include the queen, king and workers. The full-grown worker is the one normally seen above ground. It is wingless, from one-fourth to one-half inch long, reddish-brown and stoutly built. Its duties consist of carrying seeds and other plant materials into the nest for food and caring for the young in the nest.

The bite and sting of this ant is quite painful. Milk production is often reduced after cows have been attacked. The ants grab the skin with their powerful jaws and then administer a painful sting.

Activity of these ants varies with weather conditions. They are most active on warm, sunny days, especially during early spring and late fall. In very hot weather, however, they may remain in the nest during the middle of the day.

CONTROL

Successful control of the Texas harvester ant is easier if the colony is small. Large, well-established colonies are difficult to control due to a vast network of small chambers with connecting tunnels. In porous soil these chambers and tunnels may extend downward in the shape of an inverted cone to a depth of 15 feet or more. In more compact soil, they extend downward only about one foot.

Either a 2 percent dieldrin or a 5 percent chlordane dust is recommended for control of these pests. Spread about one-half pound of the dust around the entrance hole in a continuous band 4 to 6 inches wide. The diameter of this band should be 5 to 6 feet with the center at the entrance of the nest. A hand scoop or can is useful for spreading the material. Where the cleared area around the nest is less than 5 or 6 feet in diameter, the dust should be applied around the edge of the area.

Liquid fumigants also may be used to control this ant if applied when nearly all the ants are in the nest. Carbon disulfide and methyl bromide are two of the recommended fumigants. Small colonies, where the cleared area is not over 4 feet in diameter, may be treated by pouring 4 fluid ounces of carbon disulfide into the entrance hole and stamping dirt into the hole with the heel of the shoe.

Colonies having larger cleared areas require more fumigant and a special preparation of the ant nest before applying carbon disulfide. To prepare a large colony for treatment, remove 6 inches of soil from an area 3 to 6 feet in diameter around the nest entrance. This exposes the tunnels which lead to the chambers in the colony. Within one day the ants will remove the soil and debris clogging the tunnels which would retard penetration of the fumigant. Pour 8 fluid ounces of carbon disulfide into the exposed tunnels and replace the soil. Apply carbon disulfide only in the early morning or late evening.

Methyl bromide has given good control of ant colonies only in moist soil. Use a mechanical dispenser that will release the fumigant into the nest entrance 6 to 8 inches below the ground level. A special type applicator is necessary and should have a rubber tube 3 to 4 feet long attached for introduction of the liquid into the hole. This tube is inserted into the hole to a depth of 6 to 8 inches and held in place with the foot while the can of methyl bromide is opened. The liquid methyl bromide changes to gas immediately when the can is punctured and, being heavier than air, flows down into the nest. Apply 1 to 2 fluid ounces of the fumigant and pack the soil firmly over the entrance hole.

CAUTIONS: *Dieldrin and chlordane dusts are poisonous to man and animals,* but with care they can be used safely at the recommended dosages.

Carbon disulfide and methyl bromide are poisonous gases. Methyl bromide does not have a distinctive odor. Do not inhale the fumes of either fumigant. Carbon disulfide is flammable and explosive. Methyl bromide is particularly dangerous at high temperatures. Do not store in buildings where persons live or work.

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